



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH – GOVERNOR

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Gov Blagojevich announces more than 200 schools have submitted applications for *Operation Teen Safe Driving*; Allstate Foundation joins Ford as corporate sponsor

Tremendous response from schools throughout the state, to participate in first of its kind program designed to reduce teen crashes and fatalities

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) announce that 225 applications from Illinois high schools have been received, for the recently launched *Operation Teen Safe Driving* initiative. This innovative program was announced in November 2006 in an effort to decrease the number of fatalities and crashes involving teenagers in Illinois.

“It speaks volumes to have received more than 200 applications from high schools in Illinois, seeking to participate in the *Operation Teen Safe Driving* initiative,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “Illinois has led the nation in enacting tough new laws designed to save the lives of teen drivers, and now our teens are leading the nation, in terms of getting involved in the effort to educate their peers about the dangers faced by beginning drivers.”

Under this new statewide initiative, both public and private high schools around the state will be encouraged to identify the major teen traffic safety problems in their communities and to propose creative solutions, targeting their peers. Judging is taking place this week, and the 105 selected “winning” schools will be notified in mid-January.

Operation Teen Safe Driving is a statewide initiative that is modeled on the nationally recognized *Ford Driving Skills for Life* high school based pilot project implemented in 2005 by Ford, the Governors Highway Safety Association, IDOT, the Illinois State Police and local partners that halted an epidemic of 15 teen fatalities in Tazewell County in 2005 and 2006. It is also designed to build on the momentum from a series of new laws aimed at teen drivers,

stemming from Secretary of State White's Teen Driving Task Force that give Illinois some of the most stringent teen driving laws in the nation.

"We are extremely happy with the outpouring of interest for this important safety initiative," said IDOT Secretary Milton R. Sees. "Our young drivers can make a difference in their lives as well as their peers' lives, by educating themselves and each other on the responsibilities and dangers of getting behind the wheel. We look forward to seeing the creative ideas these students have come up with."

Selection of the "winning" programs will be based on each school's effectiveness in identifying a problem, creativity in proposals to address the problem and the program's ability to reach teens and the entire community. High schools that come up with the most creative solutions will be invited to participate in a half-day Ford sponsored "Ride and Drive" safe-driving clinic. These clinics will be taking place in the Chicago area, Central Illinois and Metro-East area. These "Ride and Drive" events feature professional drivers giving young drivers rigorous behind the wheel driving exercises, including: Hazard Recognition/Accident Avoidance, Vehicle Handling/Skid Control and Speed/Space Management.

"Ford is excited to conduct the first ever state-wide launch of our Driving Skills for Life program in Illinois," said Sue Cischke, Senior Vice President Sustainability, Environment & Safety Engineering – Ford Motor Company. "Since the launch of the Driving Skills for Life program in 2003, Ford has trained thousands of teens and parents through its hands-on driving events, innovative web-based curriculum and its comprehensive school education programs. We're proud that we've made a difference by saving lives and look forward to doing the same in the state of Illinois."

IDOT is proud to announce that The Allstate Foundation has pledged its support to the *Operation Teen Safe Driving* program. The Allstate Foundation intensified its focus on safe teen driving in 2005 with the launch of "Keep the Drive", a national teen-to-teen smart driving movement. Keep the Drive harnesses the power of peer influence to change the way teens think and act in the car. The Allstate Foundation joins a long list of supporters of *Operation Teen Safe Driving*. The Office of the Governor, the Illinois Secretary of State, IDOT's Division of Traffic Safety, Illinois State Police, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Illinois Liquor Control Commission in partnership with the Ford Motor Company Fund are all backing the program. Also supporting the Illinois campaign are the Governors Highway Safety Association, RADD ("The Entertainment Industry's Voice for Road Safety"), and SADD (originally founded as "Students Against Drunk Driving" and now standing for "Students Against Destructive Decisions").

"Supporting *Operation Teen Safe Driving* is a natural extension of Allstate's long-standing commitment to teen driver safety," said Dave Prendergast, Assistant Field Vice President for Allstate's Midwest Region and father of a teen driver. "Our research shows that peer-driven campaigns, much like the ones submitted by schools through this new program, can have a powerful effect on teen driving behavior. The Allstate Foundation is thrilled to join forces with IDOT and all of our partners on this important issue."

As the applications have poured in, the calendar has turned to 2008, and several new laws aimed at teen drivers have taken effect in Illinois.

Senate Bill 172, known as Secretary of State Jesse White's Teen Driving Bill, was signed into law by Gov. Blagojevich last August and gives Illinois some of the toughest laws in the nation for teen drivers. This law extends the time for a learners permit from three months to nine months, extends curfews for teen drivers and doubles the time during which a driver under 18 with a graduated driver's license may carry only one unrelated passenger under the age of 20, excluding siblings.

This law also allows ticketing for all passengers age 15 to 20, for riding in the car driven by the new driver. The law also establishes tough new sanctions for street racing, and strengthens sanctions for repeat violations for any drivers under the age of 21.

House Bill 518 was initiated by Secretary White and authorizes his office to establish a Web site for parents to check the driving record of their children, at no cost. The legislation aims to give parents an additional tool to ensure that teens are safe and responsible drivers.

Senate Bill 140 raises the age at which a teen with an instruction permit or a graduated driver's license may drive while simultaneously talking on a cell phone, from 18 to 19 years old. Exceptions will be made for emergencies. SB 140 toughens legislation the Governor signed into law in 2005, and is intended to reduce crashes caused by distracted teen drivers. The law ensures that all high school students holding a driving permit or graduated license are prohibited from using a cell phone while driving, even if they are 18 years old.

Both nationally and in Illinois, teen drivers make up approximately 7 percent of the driving population, but are involved in roughly 20 percent of traffic crashes and more than 12 percent of traffic fatalities. While Illinois has had strong success in reducing the overall number of fatalities – by 200 a year since 2003 – the number of teen fatalities has remained roughly the same. In 2005 in Illinois, there were 151 fatal crashes that involved drivers between the ages of 16 and 19.

For more information about *Operation Teen Safe Driving*, go to www.buckleupillinois.org.